

# In Brief

## Buddha and Buddhism in and around Rajagriha

Kamalika Ghosh<sup>†</sup>

### Introduction

Every living being has the same basic wish— to be happy by avoiding sufferings. Since this world evolved, human beings have spent much time and energy improving external conditions in their search for happiness and a solution to their many problems. Instead of their wishes being fulfilled, human suffering has continued to increase while the experience of happiness and peace is decreasing. This clearly shows that we need to find a true method for gaining pure happiness and freedom from misery. Prince Siddhartha became disillusioned with the palace life and wanted to see the outside world. He made four trips outside the palace and saw four things that changed his life. On the first three trips, he saw sickness, old age and death. He asked himself, “How can I enjoy a life of pleasure when there is so much sufferings in the world?” On his fourth trip, he saw a wandering monk who had given up everything; he owned to seek an end to suffering. “I shall be like him” Siddhartha thought. Leaving his kingdom and loved ones behind, Siddhartha became a wandering monk. He wondered around to search for the solution with proper guidance and ultimately the struggle ended, He realized the cause of sufferings and how to remove it. He had gained the most supreme wisdom and understood things as they truly are. He became the **Buddha**, ‘The Awakened One’

At various stages of His life He spent most of the time in and around Rajagriha, later known as Rajgir and after Him the place has also been the center for Buddhism.

### Formation of the Place

Indian plate started moving away from African continent in about 140 million years ago and collided with Asian continent approximately 50 million years ago. Due to this collision formation of Himalayas the youngest mountain range on this earth started and continued till approximately 600 thousand years ago. Signs of homo sapiens were found approximately 120-100 thousand years ago. Formation of Vedas can be marked as the starting point of civilization in Bharat. In 10,000 BCE the composition of Vedas was going on. Meherghar, the earliest evidence of civilization in the valley of river Sindhu-Saraswati belongs to 8000 BCE. And this is the point where we start looking at the history of Bharat/ India.

After the Mahabharat War; India was divided into small and large provinces called *Janapadhadhas* and *Mahajanpadhas*. 16 Mahajandaphas became prominent after the Mahabharat War. These were: *Kuru, Panchala, Kosal, Kashi, Magadha, Anga, Kamboja, Vajji, Malla, Vatsa, Chedi, Matsya, Surasena, Ashvaka, Avanti, and Gandhar*. Most of them were subsequently absorbed into Magadha Empire.

Magadha, the core of the kingdom was the area of Bihar, south of the Ganges; its first capital was Rajagriha (modern Rajgir). Magadha expanded to include most of Bihar and Bengal with the conquest of Licchavi and Anga respectively, followed by much of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. It is also mentioned in the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas. A state of Magadha,

<sup>†</sup>Ph.D. (Engg.), Email: kamalikaghosh4@gmail.com

ORCID: Kamalika Ghosh: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6204-1057>

possibly a tribal kingdom, is recorded in Vedic texts much earlier in time than 600BCE. The city was in a valley surrounded by seven hills: Vaibhara, Ratna, Saila, Sona, Udaya, Chhatha, and Vipula.

Magadha was ruled by the Haryanka dynasty for some 200 years, c. 600 BC – 413 BC. The Mahabharata calls Brihadratha, the first ruler of Magadha. About 22 Magadha kings ruled for 1000 years. **Bimbisar** was the most remarkable king of this dynasty. He extended the boundaries of the Magadha kingdom upto Nepal. He built the city of Rajgriha. Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Jain, preached their teachings during his time.

### Buddha at Rajagriha

Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born in Kapilavastu in modern-day Nepal in the year 583 BC, during the rule of Haryanka dynasty. As the scene of many incidents in his life, including his enlightenment, Magadha is often considered as a blessed land.

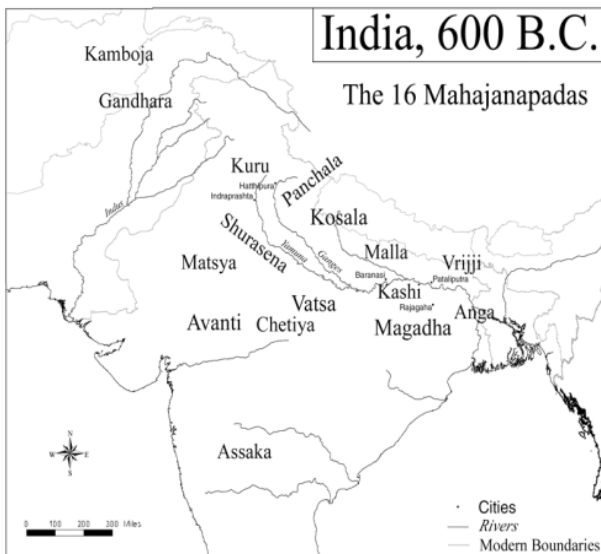


Figure 1: Ancient Indian Map, during 600 BC [13]

Leaving his kingdom and loved ones behind, Siddhartha became a wandering monk. He cut off his hair to show that he had renounced the worldly lifestyle and called himself Gautama. He wore ragged robes and wandered from place to place in his search for truth

First He moved towards Vaishali to learn Yoga from Alar Kalam, there. On the way He took rest at foothill of **Rajagriha**. King Bimbhisara,



Figure 2 : Way to Saptaparni Guha [14]



Figure 3: Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya Temple [14]



Figure 4: View of the city Rajagriha from the platform of Jarashandha ki Baithak [14]



Figure 5: Vishwa Shanti Stupa [14]



Figure 6: Buddha statue in front of Japanese Temple at Venuvan Vihar [14]

as informed by his followers went to meet that glorious saint. He then went to learn from the then Great saints *Alar Kalam* and *Ramputra Rudrak*. None of them knew how to end suffering, so he continued the search of his own.

Then He search for a clam and quiet place for mediation. At last He found a village, call *Urubela* (later on Bodhgaya) at about 82 Km

from Rajgir at the bank of river, Nairanjana. He meditated there for more than six years and as the struggle ended, he realized the cause of suffering and how to remove it. He had gained the most supreme wisdom and understood things as they truly are. He became the **Buddha**, 'The Awakened One'. From then on, he was called **Shakyamuni Buddha**.

After his enlightenment, He wanted to disclose the realization to suitable person(s) like His old teachers but by meditation He realized the they are no more .Then He went to the Deer Park near the holy city of Banaras and shared his new realisation with five holy men, namely Bapra, Bhadriya, Ashyajit, Mahanama and Kyondinyya who were His initial companion but they wanted to avoid Him. However at last they were convinced and became his disciples. This marked the beginning of the Buddhist community.

Then again He went back to Rajgir. King Bimbisara gave Venuvan Vihar to Him for his residence. It is an artificial forest, where one can enjoy Eternal peace, and meditate.

It is said that it was at Rajgir that physician treated Buddha, *Jivak* after he was injured by his cousin Devdatta. The Jivekarmavan monastery was the favorite residence for Buddha. Famous Karandatank, where Buddha used to bathe.

Now Buddha started preaching His realization from Rajgir. *Ashyajit* accompanied Him. One day Ashyajit convinced *Sariputra* and *Modgolayan*, who were then disciple of Saint Sanjay. Later on He accepted them and conferred them in *Prabajyaat Jayssthiban*. Then to a rich person who was later on named as *Maha Kassapa*.

Then He was called upon by His father and went back to Kapilabastu for a while and returned to Rajgir. Sudatta, a rich Shethy (banker) from Sravasti met Him and pleased to convert himself as a Buddhist and became *Anathpinda*. Thus we find that most of His famous disciples are from this place.

Buddha not only spent many years in Rajgir but also delivered sermons here and proselytized emperor Bimbisar at the Griddhakoota hill. This was the place where the lord Buddha set in a motion his second wheel of law and for three months even during the rainy season, preached

many inspiring sermons to his disciples. The Buddha Sangha of Japan have constructed a massive modern stupa, the **Vishwa Shanti Stupa** (Peace Pagoda), at the top of the hill in commemoration. A bridle path leads to up to the hill as well as modern ropeway.

**Work after Buddha**

Above the hot springs on the Vaibhava Hill, is a rectangular stone sculpted by the forces of nature which appears to have been used as a watch tower. Since it later became the resort of pious hermits, it is also called Pippala Cave and popularly known as “Jarasandhki Baithak” after the name of the King Jarasandh, a contemporary of Lord Krishna described in the epic Mahabharata. The site Pippala Cava has strong associations with the Buddha, who is said to have visited and stayed there often. A series of six caves in the vicinity of the hill may be the Saptaparni site, the location of the first Buddhist council held after three months and four days of the demise of Lord Buddha, The teachings of Buddha was compiled at Rajgir and it was also the venue for the **first Buddhist Council** held under the leadership of Maha Kassapa. Compilation of **Tripitak** was initiated here.

**List of Buddhist Universities near Rajagriha**

A number of monasteries grew up during the Pāla period in ancient Bengal and Magadha. According to Tibetan sources, five great



Figure 7: Vikramsila Mahavihar [16]



Figure 8 : Nalanda Viswabidyalaya [14]



Figure 9 : Location of various Universities in and around Rajagriha [15]

Mahaviharas stood out: Vikramaśīl, the premier university of the era; Nalanda, past its prime but still illustrious, Somapur, Odantapur, and Jaggadal. The five monasteries formed a network; “all of them were under state supervision” and there existed “a system of co-ordination among them. It seems from the evidence that the different seats of Buddhist learning that functioned in eastern India under the Pāla were regarded together as forming a network, an interlinked group of institutions,” and it was common for great scholars to move easily from position to position among them.

***Nalanda Vishwabidyalaya (University):***

Nalanda, although was initially a small village but a major trading place near *Rajagriha*, the then capital of Magadha. Buddha was said to have delivered lectures in a nearby forest named *Pravarik* and one of his two chief disciples, Shariputra, was born in this village and also attained nirvana there. The Jain thirthankara, Mahavira, was said to have spent 14 rainy seasons at Nalanda. Pawapuri Jain temple is very close by. This association with Buddha and Mahavira dates the existence of the village to at least the 5th–6th century BCE.

Ancient Buddhist sources say that Asoka, the Mauryan emperor (3rd Century B.C) built a temple at Nalanda. It was a flourishing hub where the philosopher and alchemist, Nagarjuna, studied and taught in the Second Century A.D. However, excavations have not revealed anything to suggest that the site was occupied before the Gupta period (Fifth Century A.D.), the earliest finds being a copper plate of Samudragupta and a coin of Kumaragupta (414-455 A.D.).

Fa-Hien who visited in the Fifth Century A.D. makes no mention of the massive monastic establishments at Nalanda. But Hiuen Tsang who came in A.D. 637 during Harsha’s reign (606-647 A.D.) refers to the great monastery that Harsha endowed with liberal grants. Bengali pandit *Silabhadra* was the renowned principal of this university and according to Divakara, the Indian translator Pandit Silabhadra divided the Buddhist teachings into three turnings of the Dharma Wheel, given in the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra*.

***Vikramashila Mahavihar (University) :***

This University was one of the two most

important centers of Buddhist learning in India during the Pal dynasty, along with Nalanda University. Vikramasīla (village Antichak, district Bhagalpur, Bihar) was established by King Dharmapal (783 to 820) in response to a supposed decline in the quality of scholarship at Nalanda. *Atish Dipankar*, the renowned Bengali pandit, is sometimes listed as a notable abbot. Vikramasīla was one of the largest Buddhist Universities and in one time had more than one hundred teachers and about one thousand students. It produced eminent scholars who were often invited by foreign countries to spread Buddhist learning, culture and religion. The most distinguished and eminent among all was Atish Dipankar, a founder of the Sarma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Subjects like philosophy, grammar, metaphysics, Indian logic etc. were taught here, but the most important branch of learning was tantrism.

***Odantapuri :*** It was also called **Odantapura** or **Uddandapura**, was a Buddhistvihara. It was established by Bengali king Gopal of Pal dynasty in the 7th century. It is considered the second oldest University of India and was situated in Magadh, now near Bihar Sharif. *Acharya Sri Ganga* of had been a student here. According to the Tibetan records there were about 12,000 students at Odantapuri. Odantpuri was situated at Hiranya Prabhat Parvat (Mountain) and at the bank of River Panchanan. The University was reputed for its excellence in imparting Vajrayana and Tantric Buddhist studies.

In this context it is to be noted that at that time Bengal and Bihar was a united state headed by Pal dynasty. King Gopal married to a *Lichhabi* girl. This might be the one of the reason for all the Universities have been built up under the patronage of Pal Dynasty and Acharyas are from Bengal. Lichhabi is a very cultured race and likely be the first democratic community of India. They are mostly from *Vaishali area*, most favorite place of Lord Buddha.

All the Universities perished at the hands of the *Ali Bakhtiar Muhammad Khiljia* round 1193. Khilji’s descendants would form the Khilji dynasty in 1290 and become known for their assault on Hinduism.

### Investigation at the Site

When the Chinese Buddhist monk Fa-Hien visited Rajagriha in the early fifth century CE, he found the city deserted. Nevertheless, he wrote that the city had once been the capital of King Bimbisara and that there were four stupas, including a bend of the mountain city wall. The remains of the Jivaka monastery (located between Bodhgaya and Griddha kut Hill), and the hollow in the ground where an old well was still visible. When a Dr. Buchanan visited the site in 1812, the local people told him that the site was known as *Hangsapurnagar*, an ancient city.

The site itself has a massive stone wall that encircles a series of hills and incorporates further walled divisions within. A second walled complex, known as New Rajgir, is located beyond the north gate of the old city. Generation after generation it was pilgrimage of Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, etc. The association with the Buddha encouraged a series of explorations that began in the 19th century under Sir Arthur Cunningham. Early efforts were directed at finding structures with historical associations, and these are always difficult to relate to the actual events or foundations recorded in the literature. In 1905, Sir John Marshall and D. R. Sahni undertook extensive excavations and surveys of the walls. The excavations revealed three major levels, the lowest containing seals dated to the second or first century BCE.

Between 1912 and 1914, V. H. Jackson made a detailed plan of the city, although the place was still under dense jungle cover. The ramparts still survived, particularly along the southern edge, where the walls stood more than 10 meters (33 ft.) in height. On the eastern side, the walls were fronted by a moat partially cut from rock, and the city gate at this point crossed the moat by a bridge whose foundations were still visible. The interior contains a number of elevated areas that supported building foundations. One of these, which Jackson called a fort, has thick stone walls with bastions. It is also most intriguing because it is one of the few parts of the city commanding a view of a hill. A second fort or citadel, represented by solid stone foundations, was found beside the western wall. This survey also traced the course of some of the main city streets and encountered many wells, some cut into the living rock and still containing water. Several rectangular water tanks were also found.

Today Rajgir (i.e., Rajagriha) has come up as one of the most important pilgrimage for the Buddhist.

### Conclusion

Thus it has been observed that at various stages of life Lord Buddha spent most of His life time based on Rajagriha. His most activities were here. Most of His eminent disciples are from this place. After Him major work, i.e., compilation of *Tripitak* started here in the first Buddhist council. Most of the Buddhist Educational Institutes were established around this place. Thus it can be addressed as the most important place of Buddha and Buddhism in India.

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